Dutroux, Martin and Lelièvre guilty on all charges

After three days of deliberation, Aarlen Court of Assizes found the three main defendants Marc Dutroux, his wife Michelle Martin and his accomplice Michel Lelièvre guilty on all charges. Marc Dutroux of the murder of the girls An Marchal, Eefje Lambrecks and his accomplice Bernard Weinstein and of the kidnapping, imprisonment, rape and abuse of the girls An, Eefje, Julie Lejeune, Melissa Russo, Sabine Dardenne and Laetitia Delhez. Michelle Martin was an accessory to the imprisonment and torture of the girls, Michel Lelièvre to the imprisonment, torture and kidnapping of the girls. The maximum penalty being demanded for Dutroux is life, for Martin and Lelièvre 30 years in prison. The Brussels swindler Michel Nihoul was acquitted of the kidnapping, but found guilty of forming gangs with a view to smuggling people and drugs. The maximum penalty being demanded for him is 20 years. Sentencing is due to take place next week. Thus ends ‘the trial of the century’, which divided magistrates and public opinion.

Opinion

PETER VANDEMEERSCH • DE STANDAARD • 18 JUNE

With increasing clarity everything became concentrated on the question of whether Marc Dutroux was a solitary psychopath and pervert (the opinion of the non-believers), or whether he was a member of a larger network or criminal organisation (the believers). A heroic debate was conducted in recent years on the role of Jean-Michel Nihoul in particular. The acquittal of Nihoul would be seen by non-believers as confirmation of their theory. A conviction would have proved the believers out. During the trial the prevailing impression was that Nihoul had to demonstrate that he was not guilty. Nor did the twelve jury members reach an easy decision. In their fourfold 7-5 vote they confirmed they gulf that splits public opinion. The buck is being passed to the professional magistrates. Given the lack of evidence it was perfectly logical for them to side with the minority. The 7-5 verdict of the jury and the decision of the court are grist to the believers’ mill. Nihoul ‘got off’ by the smallest possible margin and after a decision by professional magistrates. All manner of conspiracy theories will again be given free rein. Do we now know the truth and nothing but the truth? Maybe. Maybe not. We do, however, know the ‘judicial truth’. After exhausting all legal means, all parties will have to accept this.
Leterme wants to talk with Vlaams Blok

The day after the elections, Premier Verhofstadt had already spoken out in favour of talking with the Blok because ‘Voters want their votes to be heard’

C D&V Chairman Yves Leterme, who has the difficult task of setting up a new Flemish government, has begun an extensive information round. From 15 to 17 June he has been holding talks in the Flemish Parliament with trade unions, employers’ representatives, other interest groups and with the Flemish Civil Service. As from Friday 18 June it was the turn of the political parties. Surprisingly Leterme also announced he would be holding talks with the Vlaams Blok ‘out of respect for the 980,000 Blok voters’. He has, however, precluded involving the party in the real negotiations on the formation of a government. There will therefore be no question of breaking the cordon sanitaire around the Blok. The day after the elections, Premier Verhofstadt had already spoken out in favour of talking with the Blok because ‘Voters want their votes to be heard’ (FF).

ERIC DONCKIER • HET BELANG VAN LIMBURG • 17 JUNE

Leterme hopes to be able to begin the actual government negotiations at the end of next week. This will have to be done on the basis of a memorandum to which he will put the finishing touches on Wednesday. That is when he hopes to receive the advice of the Auditor’s Office on Flemish finances. In anticipation of that he is holding talks with what is generally described as the ‘centre-field’ (interest groups, trade unions, ed.). In the meantime, there is to be an initial exchange of ideas on Friday involving all Flemish parties. That the Vlaams Blok will be involved is a first. Yves Leterme justifies this as ‘respect for the one million Flemings who voted for this party.’ He also wants further explanation from the party’s big guns on a number of points from the Blok manifesto and wants to know how they would resolve certain social problems. According to Leterme, no other conclusions can be drawn from his talks with the Blok. ‘It is in no way my intention to form a government with the Vlaams Blok,’ says Leterme. Groen! will also be involved on Friday, and according to Leterme the same reasoning applies here as for the Blok: how would Groen! resolve certain problems? There was no clear answer to the question of whether Leterme would possibly still attempt to join a federal government.

Karel De Gucht is Chairman of the VLD again

with his rehabilitation the VLD gives the signal that they are closing ranks again. The second step consists of getting grips with the Verhofstadt problem

On 16 June Karel De Gucht took over leadership of the VLD again, having been sidelined four months ago by Premier Verhofstadt and replaced by Dirk Sterckx, who was given the difficult task of guiding the damaged party through the election campaign. Now this job is done, Sterckx wants to put his temporary chairmanship behind him as quickly as possible. Under Sterckx’s chairmanship, De Gucht had remained ‘Statutory Chairman’, which made the transfer fairly orderly. De Gucht will head negotiations for the VLD on the formation of a Flemish government. The official word is also that the differences between himself and Premier Verhofstadt have been ironed out. The conflict between De Gucht and Verhofstadt arose around immigrant voting rights, which were approved in the Federal Parliament at the beginning of this year. Then the opponents, which included the VLD, lost the vote in Parliament. De Gucht wanted to submit a further honour-saving amendment, but was prevented from doing so by Verhofstadt, who was put under heavy pressure by his Francophone partners in government, Louis Michel (MR) and Elio Di Rupo (PS). De Gucht also achieved a surprisingly good personal result in the latest regional elections (FF).

Opinion

STEFAN HUYSENTRUYT • DE TIJD • 17 JUNE

Yesterday De Gucht was fully rehabilitated. The election results show that De Gucht was right to fight immigrant voting rights to the bitter end. Studies show that immigrant voting rights were a major cause of the VLD’s electoral losses. The Flemish Liberals also want to give the signal with the rehabilitation of De Gucht that they are closing ranks in these difficult times. Last but not least, his return has to do with the government negotiations. If the Liberals want to get the most for their party out of these negotiations, the party’s leaders urgently need to put their house in order. Moreover, the rehabilitation of the statutory chairman is just the first phase of the operation. The second step consists of getting to grips with the Verhofstadt problem. It is not just De Gucht who has had enough of the Federal Premier’s extravagances. Verhofstadt has become a problem for his entire party. He has made the VLD great. But now he is personally ruining it. It was not just his run-in with De Gucht that caused the VLD electoral grief. His unbridled voluntarism has given him a lack of credibility that, as was evident from Sunday’s results, increasingly reflects on the entire party. Everything is therefore being done within the party to alter the perception that Verhofstadt is the VLD. The fact that De Gucht was able to return to the head of the party is also an indication in itself that Verhofstadt’s power within his party is on the wane.
Verhofstadt's chances of EC presidency grow on eve of european summit

Now that Jean-Claude Juncker, the Luxemburg Christian Democrat Premier, has officially informed the EVP faction that he does not wish to be a candidate for the Presidency of the European Commission, the chances of the Belgian Premier, Guy Verhofstadt, have risen again. Verhofstadt's candidacy has divided government leaders. But in spite of this the Irish EU President, Bertie Ahern, will almost certainly propose Verhofstadt at the European summit on 17 June because he has the most support. Schröder and Chirac support him, Blair and Berlusconi are against. The four discussed the issue last week on the sidelines of the G8 summit in Sea Island. Iraq and the pro-European stance of the Belgian premier will play a role (FF).

BERNARD BULCKE • DE STANDAARD • 16 JUNE

It is crucial that the question can be decided by qualified majority, and no longer by unanimity. The irony of fate is that among other things Guy Verhofstadt pulled that out of the fire during the difficult negotiations on the Treaty of Nice in December 2000. Then Verhofstadt let slip that this would Preclude a second Dehaene scenario. After all, until the Treaty of Nice the Commission President had to have all national and government leaders on his side. In 1994 the then British Prime Minister, John Major, was therefore able to block Jean-Luc Dehaene on his own.

GOVERNMENT FORMATION

Purples likely to remain in power at federal level

Now that Groen! has chosen an opposition course, the chances are increasing of the Purple government remaining unchanged at federal level, even though the Liberals and Socialists in Flanders and the Francophone liberals suffered heavy losses compared with the federal results of 2003. For Federal Premier Verhofstadt (VLD) it was a fait accompli on 13 June that he would remain in power. Flemish Socialist big guns are also calling for the Purples to continue at federal level. But in the light of the decision by Groen! the VLD-Vivant cartel has become indispensable at Flemish level, which means there is no chance of their being unseated by the CD&V/N-VA at federal level. One possibility, however, is a scenario in which the CD&V/N-VA cartel is invited to also govern jointly at federal level, making the compositions of the Flemish and Federal Governments symmetrical. Nevertheless, with the withdrawal of Groen! the CD&V/N-VA has lost a crowbar with which to ‘break into’ the Federal Government (FF).

RENAAT SCHROOTEN • DE TIJD • 15 JUNE

This starting position [a tripartite of the three classic political parties in Flanders, ed.] could also have repercussions for the other regions. Observers yesterday pointed out that the federal continuity of the Purples, if necessary assisted by the CD&V/N-VA, would increase the chances of PS Chairman Elio Di Rupo also opting for further collaboration between Liberals and Socialists in Brussels and Wallonia for subsequent governments.

After his cartel’s election victory, the Chairman of the CD&V, Yves Leterme, has not yet commented on his position regarding the Verhofstadt II government. But Liberal and Socialist politicians on both sides of the linguistic border emphasised on Sunday evening that the federal Purple coalition must remain in power regardless of events in Wallonia and Flanders. The Purple presence in the next Flemish government reduces the chances of Liberal or Socialist participation in government at federal level coming under review again.

Sources in the Liberal camp are emphasising that in the current situation, the formation of a Flemish government with three parties does not offer any guarantee that the CD&V/N-VA cartel will be included in the Federal Government. The cartel, which emerged as victor in the elections, may take the initiative to form a government in Flanders, but with the decision of Groen! lost the crowbars to put counter-demands at federal level. ‘They need us in Flanders, but we don’t need them in the Federal Government,’ say the Liberals.

Elio Di Rupo reiterated yesterday after the meeting of his PS party executive that in his view the Federal Government must continue. Foreign Affairs Minister, Louis Michel [MR], also wants to let the Purples continue.

Sources at the Irish EU Presidency in Dublin are now saying that the Irish Chairman, Bertie Ahern, will almost certainly propose Guy Verhofstadt at the deciding dinner on Thursday evening. On his tour of the European capitals Ahern noted that the Belgian enjoys most support. Ahern has also let it be known in several other capitals that he will propose Verhofstadt if he is not certain that the British premier has a blocking minority around him.

Blair needs 37 votes to block a decision. Himself and Berlusconi are jointly good for twenty. Yesterday evening Latvia also said it was against Verhofstadt because the Belgian backs the idea that not all Member States should in time have a commissioner.

The number of abstentions is also important, as these are not counted and lower the threshold for blocking a decision.

focus on FLANDERS • 12 June - 18 June 2004 • Number 25
Reasons behind the Blok's success

The success of the Vlaams Blok in these European elections seems to be a rather isolated phenomenon. There is dissatisfaction, euro-scepticism and low turnouts pretty much everywhere, but in the other Member States the far-right has hardly profited from this at all, notes political scientist Cas Mudde of the University of Antwerp. On the contrary, in Austria the FPÖ of Jörg Haider gained barely 6% of the votes on Sunday, and in France the Front National of Jean-Marie Le Pen was stranded on 10%. That is, it should be noted, barely more than the score of its Walloon sister party, which with 8% now also appears to be breaking through in Wallonia. In the PS bastion of Charleroi the FN even obtained 15%. Despite the comfortable victory and his personal popularity, PS Chairman Elio Di Rupo has a problem in his own back yard of Hainaut. But what explains the spectacular success of the far-right in Flanders? In Belgium there were regional elections as well as European ones, and there is also compulsory voting, even for the dissatisfied, Mudde explains. An Internet survey by Stefaan Walgrave and Peter Van Aelst of the University of Antwerp reveals that the introduction of immigrant voting rights also took moderate right-wing voters away from the VLD for the first time (FF).

JORN DE COCK • DE STANDAARD • 15 JUNE

Across the European Union, the dissatisfied decided en masse to stay at home, except in Belgium - where they dragged themselves out of bed on pain of a fine. ‘The Vlaams Blok would not immediately collapse without the obligation to turn out,’ says Mudde. ‘But the party has been around for 25 years. Yet in all these years, without compulsory voting many voters would have voted at the third or fourth time, because their vote made no difference. In Belgium a cordon sanitaire makes little sense: you don’t ‘tire out’ the dissatisfied with it, because they still have to go and vote.’ What else makes the Vlaams Blok different from the other far-right parties in Europe? ‘Also the specific local circumstances,’ says the political scientist. ‘Unlike Italy or Austria, the Vlaams Blok has not yet had its fingers burned by power. And in contrast to the FN in France, the Blok has remained a single party. France also does not have a proportional voting system: even with its highest scores, the FN had hardly any parliamentary seats. The key figures in the Blok could enter Parliament straightaway.’

GUY TEGENBOS • DE STANDAARD • 15 JUNE

According to Walgrave, the new voters of the Blok attracted have far less right-wing views than the voters that already voted for the Blok beforehand. They are also much less anti-political, there are far fewer protest voters. That is clearly a different public from the previous one that switched to the Blok. The VLD members who left their party mainly went to the Blok and the CD&V. What is remarkable is that they did not move because they disagreed with their party’s manifesto. On the contrary, they still defend that and also took it with them to their new party. Those who left did so when immigrant voting rights were under discussion, largely belonged to the right wing of the VLD and also no longer shared the opinion of Premier Verhofstadt that the country was doing well economically.

Verhofstadt’s free interpretation of election results

Premier Verhofstadt, leading European candidate for the VLD-Vivant cartel, has his own way of interpreting the poor election results of VLD-Vivant. On Sunday evening he felt that the result was not actually that bad. De Standaard listed several of the Premier’s comments and called them the ‘virtual reality of Verhofstadt’, a nice way of saying that the Premier sometimes takes liberties with interpretations (FF).

Opinion

BART BRINCKMAN • DE STANDAARD • JUNE

Verhofstadt’s reality: we only lost one small seat
The true reality: the VLD-Vivant lost two seats. But the other main parties - the Vlaams Blok, SPA/Spirit and the CD&V/V-VA - gained ten, six and five seats respectively. With the disappearance of the VU-ID twelve seats became free and available for nothing. The Liberals missed their chance.

Verhofstadt’s reality: the VLD has not bled to death, as the papers have suggested over the past few weeks. Just look at the polls: several months ago we were still at 16%.

The true reality: the VLD-Vivant cartel fell 3.8% compared with 1999, and as much as 5.5% compared with 2003. The polls never gave the VLD 16%, in the penultimate poll by De Standaard/VRT the VLD got 18.8%, and in the last poll this rose to 20.3%.

Verhofstadt’s reality: for weeks all the parties have been saying that these are Flemish elections that have nothing to do with the Federal Government.

The true reality: in that case, why was the Federal Premier played out as an absolute campaign figurehead? Moreover, the SPA, a partner in government, put forward three federal ministers as leading candidates. During the campaign Flemish and federal policy items continually crossed each other.

Verhofstadt’s reality: The negativism during the campaign allowed the far-right to grow. The CD&V/V-VA conducted a negative campaign. The cartel therefore has to consider whether this did not give rise to anti-politics.

The true reality: at the end of April Verhofstadt himself began the campaign with a virulent attack on the CD&V/V-VA cartel: gay marriages would be scrapped, the euthanasia legislation scaled down, taxes raised and the Belgian military would become bogged down in the Iraq swamp. We shall politely say nothing about the Letter to 6 million Flemings in which he suggested that chaos threatened.

WWW.PREMIER.FGOV.BE
Elections: the naked figures

Since the regional elections of 1999 (603,345 votes) the Blok electorate has grown by 378,242, an increase of 62.89%.

FF Editor

The website of the Flemish Government, www.vlaanderenkiest.be, shows all the election results of the regional and European elections in clear tables. The big winner in these elections, the Vlaams Blok, got just short of one million votes. For the Flemish Parliament the party gained 981,587, for the European Parliament 930,731. Since last year's Chamber elections (761,407 votes), it has gained 220,180 voters, and since the regional elections of 1999 (603,345 votes) the Blok electorate has grown by 378,242, an increase of 62.89%, calculated De Tijd (15 June).

It is more than evident from the votes counted that the VLD-Vivant cartel is the big loser. On Sunday the cartel obtained 804,578 votes for the Flemish Parliament and 880,279 votes for the European Parliament. In the federal elections of 1999 the two parties together were good for 933,731 votes and on 18 May last year they jointly gained 1,038,347 votes. Result: a loss of 233,000 votes compared with last year and of 53,000 votes compared with 1999.

For the other cartels it is much more difficult to calculate gains or losses, certainly compared with the Flemish elections of 1999. Then the Flemish-national VU-ID was still in Parliament, and this has since broken apart into the N-VA and Spirit. Furthermore, several of Spirit's big guns subsequently made the switch to the VLD and Groen!.

The cartel of the CD&V and N-VA is the only political formation to win more than one million votes on Sunday. For the Flemish Parliament it gained 1,060,580 votes on Sunday, and for the European Parliament 1,131,119. In the Chamber elections of 18 May 2003 a total of 1,072,148 Flemings voted for the two still separate parties. Gains: a little more than 60,000 votes. In 1999 the predecessor of the CD&V, the CVP, won 857,732 votes for the Flemish Parliament.

Checks on unemployed begin with young people

If they fail to look for a job, after being re-assessed, they may lose a part of their benefits

As Social Affairs Minister Frank Vandenbroucke (SPA) announced at the start of this year, there are to be stricter checks on the unemployed. Some 90,000 young people will be the first to be checked. Anyone who is not yet 30 and has been unemployed for at least 15 months will receive a letter this month from the National Employment Office (Rijksdienst voor Arbeidsvoorziening, RVA) inviting them for an interview. This interview is designed to determine whether the young person has made sufficient effort to find a job. If this appears not to be the case, they will be given a further four months to find work whilst being supervised. If that fails they may, after being reassessed, lose a part of their benefits (FF).

Opinion

Paul Geudens • Gazet Van Antwerpen • 15 June

Just to be perfectly clear: we approve of this measure. Belgian social security is one of the best systems in the world. Our social safety nets have very small holes. Anyone unfortunate enough to fall ill or lose their job can count on serious state support. Compared with many other countries, this support is generous and long lasting. But that can lead to abuse. For anyone who lands in the safety net the temptation can be great to remain there as long as possible. Checks are therefore necessary, let there be no mistake about it. The only way to retain our costly social system in its current form is to ensure that it is abused as little as possible. Otherwise the system will quickly become untenable. And then the first victims will be those for whom the system was set up. And yet we do have one or two misgivings about Frank Vandenbroucke's measures.

One. The RVA has to start somewhere. In this case it is with young people. But are they the biggest abusers? Anyone who looks around will see that people who have just completed their education are generally making decent efforts to find a job. It tends to be the older, longer-term unemployed who reconcile themselves to their situation. Two. The government can force people to look for a job, provided there are jobs available. The RVA cannot suspend someone because he or she does not find work within a specific time limit. Three. In this country we quite often measure with two sizes and two weights. Especially where social-security abuses are concerned. In Flanders far more unemployed people are currently suspended than in Wallonia. We fear that the new system will only intensify this distortion.

WWW.VLAANDERENKIEST.BE

On Sunday the left-wing cartel of the SPA and Spirit bagged 799,325 votes for the Flemish Parliament and 716,317 for the European Parliament. The difference with VLD-Vivant is therefore barely 5,000 votes for the Flemish Parliament, but around 163,000 votes for the European Parliament. That has a lot, if not everything to do with the competition's leading candidacy of Guy Verhofstadt. Compared with last year's Chamber elections, the cartel lost around 180,000 voters. But in 1999 the SP was at an all-time low as a consequence of the Agusta bribery affair and as a result brought just 582,419 votes over. With its result of 13 June 2004 Groen! ended up somewhere halfway between the dazzling result of 1999 and the disastrous result of last year. The target was 280,000 votes to achieve the electoral threshold. The party exceeded this slightly, with 308,898. For the European Parliament it fared even better: 320,874. Last year 162,000 people voted for Groen! in the Chamber elections of 18 May, and in 1999 after the dioxin crisis this figure was as high as 451,361.

WWW.VLAANDERENKIEST.BE

WWW.VLAANDERENKIEST.BE

WWW.RVA.BE

WWW.VDAB.BE
Schiphol and Frankfurt want to take over Zaventem airport

The Dutch airport Schiphol has made a bid for Biac (Brussels International Airport Company), the operator of Zaventem airport. The bid is estimated to involve a sum of 400 to 500 million euros for 70% of the shares. Frankfurt airport is apparently also interested in a takeover.

The Belgian State currently holds almost 64% of the shares in Biac, the operator of Zaventem. Of these, it wants to hold onto 30%. The remainder is in the hands of 10 smaller shareholders, all of whom want to sell. Last year the national airport handled 15.5 million passengers and recorded net profits of 18.9 million euros on a turnover of 271 million euros. In 2002 it made neither a profit nor a loss. Schiphol airport handled 40 million passengers, made profits of 191 million euros and is the fourth largest in Europe. The other candidate, Frankfurt (Fraport), is one of the biggest airport operators in the world, with airports in Frankfurt, Hahn, Manila and Antalya. Each year the group handles more than 70 million passengers.

According to Biac boss and former federal minister Luc Vanden Bossche, the identity of the buyer will be known by the end of 2004 (FF).

Schiphol is afraid of having an overly aggressive competitor in its back yard. This is why, according to the Volkskrant, it announced its bid this week. But our northern neighbours are not alone in the running to become the main shareholder of Zaventem. The operators of airports in Paris, Copenhagen and Vienna have already been named as possible investors. Only Frankfurt airport is known to have made an actual bid. Even several British and Australian financial groups see Zaventem as a lucrative buy.

The shareholders are now assessing the new operators on the basis of price and quality. Schiphol feels obliged to also bid for Zaventem because the competition is too close. The Dutch airport, which has seen its market share in Europe crumble in recent years, hopes that the partial acquisition of Zaventem can boost its own growth. According to reports, Schiphol is still looking for a Belgian partner for the purchase. The airport is used to involving local partners in a foreign deal.

Since the collapse of Sabena and the emergence of regional airports serving Ryanair customers, the number of passengers has fallen off. In 2002 some 21.6 million people travelled via Brussels, but last year this figure was 15.2 million. But Zaventem has considerable overcapacity and can expand to 31 million passengers a year over the next few years without additional infrastructural work. In addition, Brussels is in an important location for Schiphol between Amsterdam and Paris, the home bases of the recently merged airlines Air France and KLM. The location of Zaventem is also an important factor for the German airport operator Fraport. The expectation is that air traffic between the two European capitals, Frankfurt and Brussels, will only increase in the next few years. In the eyes of Schiphol boss Cerfontaine, Zaventem would also serve as a ’strategic reserve’ in the event that Schiphol could no longer expand any further. For several years, Frankfurt airport has also suffered from a lack of capacity.

WWW.BIAC.BE
WWW.FRAPORT.COM
WWW.SCHIPHOL.COM

VANESSA DEBRUYNE • DE MORGEN • 16 JUNE

BIAC: BREAKDOWN OF THE CAPITAL

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BIAC: PASSENGERS AND CARGO

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CONSOLIDATED ACCOUNTS

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Doughty Hanson buys Balta for 600 million Euros

Balta is the world’s largest manufacturer of flooring and the European market leader in carpets

The British venture capital fund Doughty Hanson is taking over the West Flanders flooring group Balta. The British fund is paying 600 million euros, or 5.7 times the operating cash-flow (ebitda) expected in the long term, claims De Tijd. After the take-over Doughty Hanson will sell 20% of the share capital to the Balcaen family, the owner of Balta, and 10% to the Balta management team. Last year Balta achieved a turnover of 460 million euros and employs 3,500 people, 3,200 of them in Belgium. It is the world’s largest manufacturer of flooring and the European market leader in carpets. The group also makes wall coverings and laminates [FF].

RENÉ DE WITTE • DE TIJD • 16 JUNE

The bank debts of slightly more than 400 million euros are being taken over by the Royal Bank of Scotland and Credit Suisse First Boston, the two banks that are providing the funds for the leveraged buy-out operation. Doughty Hanson is taking over seven of the eight divisions. IVC from Avelgem, the vinyl division that is good for a turnover of 100 million euros, is not being taken over. This will remain entirely owned by Managing Director Filip Balcaen. At Balta, Balcaen is handing over the operational management to the new management team. Balcaen will become a director of Balta and adviser to the management. Doughty Hanson is getting five seats on the newovesity Board of Directors. Managers Paridaens (General Manager) and Ysenhaert (Financial Director) will also become directors. According to Yann Duchesne, the General Manager of Doughty Hanson in France, Balta has strong internal growth potential and good profitability.

The conditions are in place to now allow external growth as well. Balta is now targeting acquisitions. The company wants to expand into a major European group. The group is taking its inspiration from the wave of consolidations that took place years ago in the US and was done partly via the stock market. Balta also harbours ambitions to be listed on the stock exchange. The flotation would take place over five years or sooner and offer Doughty Hanson a way out. According to Yann Duchesne, they are considering floating the company on Euronext Brussels. ‘That is the most suitable stock exchange for Balta,’ he says.

WWW.BALTA.BE
WWW.DOUGHTYHANSON.COM

Luc Tuymans in Tate Modern

IN THE NEIGHBOURING ROOMS TO THE EDWARD HOPPER EXHIBITION THERE WILL BE A MAJOR OVERVIEW EXHIBITION WITH TUYMANS’ WORK

In London’s Tate Modern the retrospective exhibition of Edward Hopper has had a flood of visitors. With the arrival of post-modernism in the 1980s this American realist became immensely popular and some of his paintings, such as Nighthawks and A woman in the Sun, became real icons. In the neighbouring rooms of that same Tate Modern there will be a major overview exhibition with work by the Flemish Luc Tuymans from 23 June. Just like Hopper, Tuymans works the achievements of cinematic lighting in a cool manner into his canvasses. Tuymans is the first living Belgian to be given a solo exhibition in Tate, making this the provisional crown of the international career of this Antwerp-based artist. In 2001 he exhibited in the Belgian pavilion of the Venice Biennale with a series on Belgium’s colonial past in the Congo and had a major overview exhibition in Tokyo. That same year in Berlin he exhibited with a much talked-about exhibition on Nazism. Works by Tuymans also form part of collections in New York museums such as the Guggenheim and MoMa (FF).

JAN BRAET • KNACK • 16 JUNE

In his major mid-career exhibition in London’s Tate Modern Tuymans wanted to test out his weak spots. For this, the Antwerp painter took three curators by the arm, Emma Dexter (Tate), Julian Heynen (K21, Düsseldorf) and Jesus Fuenmayor (Venezuela). ‘He wanted to push himself further,’ concludes his Antwerp gallerist Frank Demaegd (Zeno X). Tuymans therefore went looking for his blind spots. This approach ties in with the logic of an oeuvre that for 30 years has painted both the outer world and the inner subtlety in a state of decay and degeneration. This is done in largely matt, sometimes toxic to dazzling tones, with a cool temperature. The exhibition will include 70 paintings, sparsely spread over 12 rooms. The works are divided on the basis of corresponding groups. It is a rigorous choice, from his major historical themes - concentration camps, the Congo - to subdued micro-surfaces and objects. Among the latter, three paintings from the early series ‘Speelgoed’, a nod to Edward Hopper. In the centre, a gigantic and venomous Still Life, strongly contested at Documenta 11 in Kassel.
Diary

MUSIC, DANCE, THEATRE

- Until 22 June: Venetian Journal and Satyricon by Bruno Maderna, director: Georges Lavaudant, Flanders Opera House, Ghent; info: www.vlaamseopera.be
- 21 June: Festival of Music with La Vache/Der Alpenjäger/Liesbeth contest, Concertgebouw, Bruges; info: www.concertgebouw.be
- Until 31 July: St. Italian music, museum of Architecture, Brussels;
- Until 22 August: The rest of the world, Colors magazine shows psychiatry, Museum Dr. Guislain, Ghent; info: www.guislain.be
- Until 3 October: Marcel Breuer, Design & Architecture, exhibition CIVA, Brussels; info: www.civa.be
- Until 1 August: Flee from the War, historical exhibition, Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres
- Until 30 June: Models by Ludwig Vandevelde, Groeningemuseum, Bruges; info: www.brugge.belgium
- Until 31 July: the Brueghel track: exhibitions on locations in Bruegel's paintings, Brussels
- Until 26 September: Sam Durant, 12 Signs, SMAK, Ghent; info: 09/221.17.03 www.smak.be
- Until 26 September: Olympic Games for animals, Museum of natural sciences, Brussels; info: 02/627.42.38 www.natuurwetenschappen.be
- Until 26 September: The Thomas Neyrinck Collection, exhibition, Belleveumusea, Brussels; info: 070/23.37.28
- Until 26 June: Pretty World, exhibition, Aeroplastics, Brussels; info: www.aeroplastics.net
- 18 to 20 June: Antiques and Brocante in Brussels, Paleis I, De Heizel, Brussels
- Until 18 August: Honoré d’O and Toon Tersas, Muhka, Antwerp; info: www.muhka.be
- Until 27 September: The fall of the New Troy, exhibition Venetiannse Gaanderijen, Ostend; info: 059/56.20.15

EXPO

- Until 28 August: The Realm of the Dragon, exhibition, St Pietersabdij, Gent
- Until 17 October: Animals in Architecture, Museum of Architecture, Brussels
- Until 26 June: The rest of the world, Colors magazine shows psychiatry, Museum Dr. Guislain, Ghent; info: www.guislain.be
- Until 5 September: Speaking Sculptures, the Songye, Museum of Africa, Tervuren; info: www.afrikamuseum.be
- Until 3 October: Marcel Breuer, Design & Architecture, exhibition CIVA, Brussels; info: www.civa.be
- Until 22 August and 5 September: SMAK exhibitions: Ivan Usle, Open Rooms and Sam Durant with ‘12 Signs. Transposed and illuminated, Ghent; info: www.smak.be
- Until 1 August: The invention of Landscape, exhibition, Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp; info: www.rubens2004.be
- Until 22 August: Flee from the War, historical exhibition, Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres
- Until 30 June: Models by Ludwig Vandevelde, Groeningemuseum, Bruges; info: www.brugge.belgium
- Until 31 July: the Brueghel track: exhibitions on locations in Bruegel's paintings, Brussels
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